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Letter dated 3 May 2007 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw to your attention the statement made by Alexei Borodavkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), at the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council held in Vienna on 3 May 2007 (see annex).

I should be grateful if this letter and its annex could be circulated as official documents of the Security Council and of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly under agenda item 75.

(*Signed*) Vitaly **Churkin**

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Annex to the letter dated 3 May 2007 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation at the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

Vienna, 3 May 2007

The situation in Estonia

Next week one of the great dates in world history will be commemorated — 9 May, the sixty-second anniversary of the liberation of Europe from Nazism. In most States, in accordance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 59/26 and in the spirit of the OSCE Ministerial Declaration on the Sixtieth Anniversary of the End of World War II, VE day will be solemnly celebrated and a tribute will be paid to the memory and the achievements of those who gave their lives in the fight against Hitlerism. The Estonian authorities decided to mark this great day in a different way. The Bronze Soldier memorial in Tonismagi Square in the centre of Tallinn was dismantled and the graves of the Soviet soldiers buried there were opened.

This was done despite countless appeals from the Russian Federation, a group of members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Estonian public. It was a gross violation of the norms of international law, particularly article 34 of Additional Protocol 1 to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which states that military gravesites may be moved only upon the request of the next of kin or in case of investigative necessity. It also disregarded the request made to the President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, by the daughter of Captain Ivan Mikhailovich Sysoev, who was buried at Tonismagi, not to transfer the remains of her father and of the other soldiers.

The memorial was dismantled on the orders of the Government of Estonia during the night of 27 April, in secret, in the hope that public opinion would be resigned to the commission of the lawless action and outrage to the memory of the fallen Soviet soldiers. But this hope was vain. Thousands of protesters took to the streets in Tallinn and other Estonian cities demanding restoration of the monument and inviolability of the memorial. This spontaneous protest was harshly repressed by the Estonian authorities, using rough force that exceeded all permissible limits. They resorted to the use of truncheons, tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets. People were seized in the streets, beaten, handcuffed and placed in detention. These people included journalists. There were not enough cells in Tallinn and the authorities had to transform the Tallinn port terminal into a temporary prison, to which according to the media they took about 450 detainees. The people thrown into this torture chamber took pictures with their cell phones and their accounts of inhuman treatment, insults and beatings bring back memories of episodes from the darkest days of recent European history.

According to media reports, since 27 April the Estonian police have detained over a thousand people, arrested 51 people, including NGO representatives, and wounded dozens.

As a result of the clashes which occurred when the Estonian authorities attempted to disperse the demonstrations that occurred in Tallinn in the night of 26/27 April in defence of the Bronze Soldier memorial, Dmitri Ganin, a Russian citizen permanently resident in Estonia, was killed. The Russian Federation demands that the Estonian authorities should provide full information on what happened, conduct an investigation as a matter of urgency and bring to justice those guilty of this crime.

Among the protesters, against whom the Estonian authorities used harsh repressive measures, were representatives of various nationalities. However, most of them were Russian-speaking, i.e. the group constituting almost one third of the population of Estonia which is still disenfranchised, does not have citizenship or full electoral rights and is subjected to linguistic discrimination.

The dismantling and transfer of the Bronze Soldier memorial and the reburial of the remains of the Soviet soldiers in Tallinn are perceived in the Russian Federation as a desecration of our sacred objects. These actions by the Estonian authorities evoke indignation and strong condemnation. The Russian Federation also strongly condemns the use of flagrant violence, insults and beatings inflicted on the participants in the Tallinn demonstrations. I quote the words of Sergei Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation: "I think this is disgusting ... This blasphemy cannot be justified ...". According to an opinion poll, about 80 per cent of the adult population of the Russian Federation shares this view.

I should like to recall that Tallinn — one of the most beautiful cities in Europe — survived during the war thanks only to the courage and selflessness of the Soviet soldiers who in the autumn of 1944 completed a 120-kilometre march and, literally on the heels of the retreating Hitlerites and the Estonian SS, rushed into the city and thus prevented its destruction. Tens of thousands of Soviet soldiers were killed liberating Estonia.

The attempt by the Estonian authorities to belittle this exploit, to erase the memory of it from public consciousness and to pin the label of occupiers on those who defeated Nazism is unacceptable. It is particularly alarming that in recent years Estonia has been glorifying the Estonian SS and fostering neo-Nazi feelings, and opponents of fascism are being subjected to attacks.

All this is perceived as an attempt to rewrite the outcome of the Second World War and will undoubtedly have serious consequences for Russian-Estonian relations.

We have more than once suggested in OSCE that measures should be taken to deal with what is happening in Estonia. Unfortunately, we have heard no adequate response. And the Estonian authorities have taken this silence as encouragement for their illegal and inhuman actions. The gross violations of human rights in Estonia that we have witnessed recently are the consequence of the indifference and connivance of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization — organizations that have granted membership to a country flouting the values on which European culture and democracy are based. In the end, the blasphemy committed in Estonia will certainly affect the Russian Federation's relations with the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance.

I should like again to invite the Chairman-in-Office, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office combating various forms of xenophobia to make an objective assessment of the events in Estonia and to demand that the Estonian authorities respect the memory of those who fell in the struggle against Nazism and stop discriminating against the Russian-speaking population living in that country.

The recent statements made by the representative of Germany on behalf of the European Union and by the United States representative are disappointing. Instead of condemnation of the illegal and inhuman actions of the Estonian authorities, concern was expressed about the peaceful demonstration by indignant Russian citizens at the Estonian Embassy in Moscow. Against the background of the sharp criticism often voiced by the Ambassadors of Germany (on behalf of the European Union) and of the United States on the subject of human rights violations attributed to the Russian Federation and a number of other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, their statements today can be viewed only as a new manifestation of double standards and bias. We regret that the European Union and the United States were not principled enough to make an objective assessment of the events in Estonia.

We categorically reject the accusations that the Russian Federation is not complying with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and is not ensuring the security of the Estonian Embassy in the Russian Federation. In fact, the fuss about this artificially created problem is designed to divert the attention of international public opinion from the illegal and inhuman actions of the Estonian authorities in dismantling and relocating the Bronze Soldier memorial in Tallinn and from the repression against the demonstrators in the Estonian capital.

A peaceful demonstration took place at the Estonian Embassy in Moscow of Russian citizens indignant about the desecration of our sacred objects and the cruelty of the Estonian police, who used harsh force against the protestors in Tallinn. Thus this demonstration in Moscow was provoked by the Estonian side itself.